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Information cursors.

Abstract:

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(A1) Information cursors are provided for use in an operating system and/or application programs. Each information cursor includes a pointing portion to point to objects displayed on a video display and an information portion to display information about an object to which the pointing portion points. The information displayed in an information cursor may include the name of the object, a preview of the contents of the object, or property information about the object.

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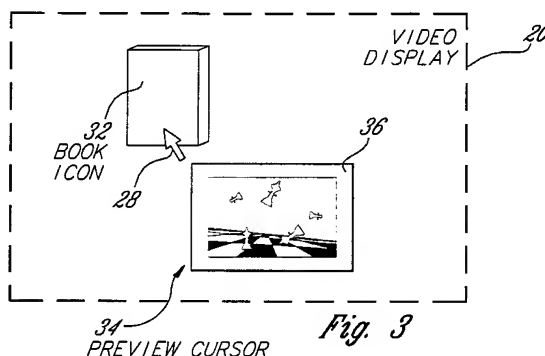
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(57) Information cursors are provided for use in an operating system and/or application programs. Each information cursor includes a pointing portion to point to objects displayed on a video display and an information portion to display information about an object to which the pointing portion points. The information displayed in an information cursor may include the name of the object, a preview of the contents of the object, or property information about the object.

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Technical Field

The present invention relates generally to data processing systems and, more particularly, to information cursors for use on video displays of data processing systems.

Background of the Invention

Many operating systems provide a cursor that indicates a current position on a video display. The cursor is generally manipulable by an input device, such as a keyboard or a mouse. In certain operating systems, such as the Microsoft WINDOWS, version 3.1, operating system, which is sold by Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington, a window may have a status bar that displays information about the object to which the cursor is currently pointing. As the cursor is moved to point at different objects, the contents of the status bar changes accordingly. The status bar is a separate graphic entity that is not connected to the cursor and does not move with the cursor. The status bar is positioned on the video display at a fixed location within a window. As such, a user has to look at two separate portions of the screen if he wishes to view both the cursor and the status bar. This separation of the status bar from the cursor can be confusing and burdensome to the user.

Summary of the Invention

In accordance with a first aspect of the present invention, a method is practiced in a data processing system having a video display and an input device. In this method, objects, including an information cursor, are displayed on a video display. The cursor is positioned over at least a portion of one of the objects that is displayed in response to a user using the input device. Information about the object which at least a portion of the cursor is over is displayed on the video display.

The information that is displayed as part of the cursor may include a name of the object, a preview of the contents of the object, or property information about the object. The property information may include help information regarding the object. Furthermore, the input device may be a mouse that is used to position the cursor.

The information cursor may be displayed as having a pointing portion for pointing to objects on the video display and an information portion for displaying information about the object. The information cursor may be specified as "On" or "Off". When the information cursor is specified as "On", information about the object is displayed as part of the cursor. However, when the information cursor is specified as "Off", such information is not

displayed as part of the cursor.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a cursor, a source-object icon for a source object, and a destination-object icon for a destination object are displayed on a video display. The cursor is moved to point to the source object icon in response to movements of a mouse by a user. A name of the source object is displayed as part of the cursor on the video display. In response to the user depressing the button of the mouse while the cursor points to the source-object icon and moving the mouse while keeping the button depressed, the source-object icon is dragged over the video display to where the destination-object icon is positioned. The cursor then points to the destination object icon and the name of the destination object is displayed along with the name of the source object as part of the cursor.

In accordance with still another aspect of the present invention, a method is practiced wherein a pointing portion of an information cursor is displayed on the video display. The pointing portion points to an icon associated with an object. Information about the object that is associated with the icon to which the pointing portion points is displayed as part of the information cursor.

In accordance with a further aspect of the present invention, a data processing system includes a video display and an input device that is operable by a user to communicate with the data processing system. The data processing system includes a means for producing a user interface on the video display and a means for displaying objects on the user interface. The data processing system further includes a means for displaying a cursor and for moving the cursor in response to a user operating the input device. The cursor has an indicator portion and information display portion. The indicator portion indicates a user selected one of the objects that is displayed on the user interface. In addition, the data processing system includes a means for displaying information in the information display portion of the cursor regarding the object that is indicated by the indicator portion of the cursor.

The means for displaying information may include a means for displaying a name of the object, a means for displaying a preview of the object, or a means for displaying property information about the object. Still further, the data processing system may include a means for turning "On" or "Off" the cursor such that when the cursor is turned "Off", the means for displaying information is deactivated.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a data processing system for practicing a preferred embodiment

of the present invention.

Figures 2a, 2b and 2c each contain a diagram showing an example of a name cursor generated in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3 is a diagram showing an example of a preview cursor generated in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a diagram showing an example of combined name and preview cursor generated in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 5 is a diagram showing an example of property cursor generated in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 6 is a flowchart showing the steps performed to implement the information cursors of the preferred embodiment of present invention.

Figure 7 is a flowchart illustrating in more detail how information about an object is displayed in an information cursor generated in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 8 is a flowchart illustrating the steps performed by the preferred embodiment of the present invention in displaying a name cursor in a drag and drop operation.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The present invention provides "information cursors" which display graphical or textual information about an object to which the cursor points. Each information cursor has two portions: a pointing portion and an information portion. The pointing portion points to a position on a video display. The information portion displays textual or graphical information about the object to which the pointing portion points. Information cursors are made available by an operating system to applications that are run on the operating system. Information cursors are available in a number of different varieties. Four varieties of information cursors are provided by the preferred embodiment. The four varieties of information cursors are name cursors, preview cursors, combined name and preview cursors, and property cursors. The four types of information cursors are described in more detail below.

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a data processing system 10 that is suitable for practicing the preferred embodiment of the present invention. The data processing system 10 includes a central processing unit (CPU) 12 that oversees operation of the system. The data processing system 10 also includes a memory 14, a keyboard 16, a mouse 18, and a video display 20. The memory 14 may include different types of storage, such as RAM, ROM, or disk storage. The memory 14 holds a copy of an operating system 22. A mouse driver 24

is provided within the operating system 22 to drive the mouse 18.

Before discussing the implementation details of the information cursors in the preferred embodiment of the present invention, it is helpful to further examine the different varieties of information cursors that are provided by the preferred embodiment. Figure 2a shows an example of a name cursor 26 displayed on the video display 20. Name cursor 26 includes a pointing portion 28 (i.e., a conventional pointing cursor) and a name box 30. The name box 30 displays the name of the object to which the pointing portion 28 points.

Figure 2b shows an example of how the name cursor 26 is used. Suppose that a book icon 32, representing a book of text stored in the system 10 (Figure 1), is displayed on the video display 20. When the pointing portion 28 of the name cursor 26 points to the book icon 32, the name box 30 of the name cursor displays the phrase "Book Cover". More generally, the name box 30 displays the name of the item to which the pointing portion 28 points. The user interface may be programmed such that, when the pointing portion 28 points to nothing of significance, the name box 30 remains blank. Alternatively, the user interface may be programmed so that the name box 30 disappears in such an instance.

In some circumstances, the name cursor 26 may include two name boxes 30a and 30b, such as shown in Figure 2c. For instance, in an operating system that supports drag and drop operations, two names may be displayed in the name cursor 26 during a drag and drop operation. In particular, the name of the source object and the name of the target object are shown in name boxes 30a and 30b, respectively. The target object name is not shown until the pointing portion 28 of the name cursor 26 is moved to point to the target object. A source object icon 33 for the source object is dragged along with the cursor during the drag portion of the operation.

Figure 3 shows an example of a preview cursor 34, which includes a preview portion 36 and the same pointing portion 28 as the name cursor 26. The preview cursor 34 provides a preview of the contents of the object to which the cursor points. In the example shown in Figure 3, the preview cursor 34 points to the book icon 32 displayed on the video display 20. The preview portion 36 holds graphical data depicting a preview of the contents of the object (i.e., the book icon 32) to which the pointing portion 28 points. In the example of Figure 3, the book concerns chess, and the preview portion 36 shows a graphical scene of chess pieces flying through the air.

The name cursor 26 (Figures 2a, 2b and 2c) and the preview cursor 34 (Figure 3) may be

combined into a combined name and preview cursor 38, as shown in Figure 4. The combined name and preview cursor 38 includes three components. First, the preview cursor 38 includes a pointing portion 28 for pointing to an object on the video display 20, at least one name box 30 (two name boxes are used with a drag and drop operation, in a fashion analogous to that described above for the name cursor) for displaying the name of the object to which the pointing portion points and a preview portion 36 for holding a preview of the contents of the object to which the pointing portion points. In the example illustrated in Figure 4, the name box 30 displays the phrase "Book Cover", whereas the preview portion 36 displays the graphic of chess pieces flying through the air.

An additional variety of information cursor that is provided by the preferred embodiment of the present invention is a property cursor 40, such as shown in Figure 5. A property cursor 40 includes the pointing portion 28 and a property box 42. The property box 40 displays property information (often including the name of the object) regarding the object to which the pointer portion 28 points. In the example of Figure 5, the property cursor 40 serves as a help cursor that displays help information in the property box 42 for the object to which the pointing portion 28 points. In Figure 5, the pointer portion 28 points to a maximize button 44. The text in the property box 42 identifies the nature of the maximize button 44 to which the pointer portion 28 points and displays relevant help information regarding this object.

The implementation of the preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to the Microsoft WINDOWS, version 3.1, operating system. In particular, the operating system 22 is an embellished version of the Microsoft WINDOWS, version 3.1, operating system that supports the use of information cursors. The present invention is not limited to implementations with this operating system; rather, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the present invention may be implemented with other operating systems as well.

In explaining the implementation of the preferred embodiment of the present invention, it is helpful to consider the type of input device that is used. In the discussion that follows, it is assumed that the mouse 18 (Figure 1) is used as the input device for manipulating the position of the cursor on the video display 20. It should, nevertheless, be appreciated that the present invention is not limited to the use of a mouse as the input device; rather, other input devices, such as a keyboard or a pointing device, may alternatively be used.

The operating system 22 (Figure 1) logically divides the user interface into a number of win-

dows. In general, each window has a separate window procedure associated with it. The operating system 22 maintains a message queue for each program that generates windows. As a program may generate multiple windows, the message queue may hold messages for multiple windows. When an event occurs, the event is translated into a message that is put into the message queue for the program. The program retrieves and delivers the message to the proper window procedure by executing a block of code known as the "message loop". The window procedure that received the message then processes the message.

When a user positions a cursor with the mouse 18 over a window or clicks the mouse by depressing one of the mouse buttons within the window, the procedure for the window receives a mouse message. The operating system 22 provides a number of predefined mouse messages. The mouse messages specify the status of mouse buttons and the position of the cursor within the window. The position of the cursor within the window is specified in (X, Y) coordinates relative to the upper left-hand corner of the window. The window procedure receives the mouse message and utilizes the information contained in the message to respond to the mouse activities. A new mouse message need not be generated for every single pixel position change of a mouse within a window; rather, a message may be generated each time the mouse moves more than a threshold number of pixels transversed by the mouse.

This message system plays a role in the implementation of information cursors described above. The appearance of the cursors on the video display 20 (Figure 1) is dictated by bitmaps stored within the operating system 22. The role that the message loop serves in the implementation of the information cursors can be seen in the flowchart of Figure 6, which illustrates the steps performed by the system 10 (Figure 1) when the cursor moves into a window that is displayed on the video display 20. Initially, the cursor position is moved by the mouse 18 or other input device to point within the window (step 48 in Figure 6). A message is generated and sent to the application program that is executing, which, in turn, forwards the message to the window procedure associated with the window (step 50). The message specifies the position of the cursor in the window as described above. The window procedure then determines what is displayed at the cursor position within the window (step 52). For instance, an object may be at the specified position or nothing of particular importance may be at the specified position. A determination is made whether the specified position corresponds to the position of an object with an identity (step 54). In other words, a determination is

made whether a named entity is present at the specified cursor position. If a named entity is present at the specified cursor position, the information regarding the object at the specified cursor position is displayed in the information cursor (step 56). If, however, a named entity is not present at the specified cursor position, either a conventional cursor is displayed or the information containing portion (e.g., name box 30, preview portion 36 or property box 40) of the information cursor is shown in blank (step 57). The choice between these options is controlled by the application program.

Figure 7 is a flowchart showing in more detail the steps that must be performed in order to realize step 56 of Figure 6. After the window procedure has determined what is at the specified cursor position, the procedure passes a message to the operating system 22 (Figure 1) that tells the operating system what type of cursor to display and sets forth the contents and type of information to be displayed in the cursor (step 58 in Figure 7). Suppose that the application program desires to display a name cursor 26 (Figure 2a). A message requesting that a name cursor be displayed is passed to the operating system 22 along with a text string for the name to be displayed in the name box 30. However, if the cursor to be displayed is a preview cursor 34 (Figure 3), a message specifying that a preview cursor is required is sent. The message includes a pointer to a bitmap of graphical information that the operating system 22 should use in the preview portion 36. Still further, a property cursor 46 may be requested in the message. The message, in such a case, includes a text string for the text of property information to be displayed in the property box 42.

Whether the information cursor is displayed depends upon whether the information cursor is designated as "On" or "Off". The operating system checks whether the information cursor is "On" (step 60). In certain instances, the user may have the option of specifying whether the information cursor is "On" or "Off". Alternatively, the information cursors may be programmed by the application program or operating system 22 (Figure 1) such that they are automatically turned "On" when the conventional cursor points to a named entity. This latter option provides an automatic mechanism for switching "On" or "Off" the information cursor. If the information cursor is not "On", a conventional cursor is displayed (step 64). As an example, consider the name cursor 26. If the name cursor 26 is "Off", the name box 30 is not displayed (Figure 2a). Instead, a conventional cursor is displayed. On the other hand, if the name cursor is "On", the pointing portion 28 is displayed along with the appropriate name information (step 62) to be used

in the name box.

The name cursor 26 (Figure 2c) that is shown during a drag and drop operation is somewhat unique relative to the other types of information cursors. Figure 8 is a flowchart showing the steps performed by the preferred embodiment of the present invention to display the name cursor 26 during a drag and drop operation. The generation of messages from the mouse 18 and the response of window procedures are the same as described above for the single-name name cursor. In step 66, the pointing portion 28 of the name cursor points to a source object, and the name of the source object is displayed in the first name box 30a (see Figure 2c), such as described above for the single-name-box name cursor of Figures 2a and 2b. A user then depresses the mouse button while the pointing portion 28 of the name cursor points to the source-object icon (step 68) and drags the source-object icon by moving the mouse and keeping the button depressed (step 70) until the source-object icon is positioned over a destination-object icon.

The system performs a loop while the source-object icon is being dragged. In particular, the system checks whether the pointing portion 28 of the name cursor is positioned over a destination object (step 72). If not, a blank is displayed for the destination object name in the second name box 30b. The system checks whether the mouse is released (step 76). If not, the drag continues (step 70). When the pointing portion is positioned over a destination object, the name of the destination object is then displayed in the second name box 30b (see Figure 2c) of the name cursor 36 (step 72 of Figure 8). The loop continues until the mouse button is released to terminate the drag and drop operation.

While the present invention has been described with reference to a preferred embodiment thereof, those skilled in the art will appreciate that various changes and form of the detail may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

Claims

1. In a data processing system having a video display and an input device, a method, comprising the steps of:
 - (a) displaying objects on the video display, said objects including an information cursor;
 - (b) in response to a user using the input device, positioning the cursor over at least a portion of one of the objects that is displayed; and
 - (c) displaying information on the video display about the object that at least a portion

of the cursor is over.

2. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of displaying information on the video display further comprises the step of displaying a name of the object that at least a portion of the cursor is over. 5
3. The method as recited in claim 2 wherein the step of displaying information on the video display further comprises the step of displaying a preview of contents of the object that at least a portion of the cursor is over. 10
4. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of displaying information on the video display further comprises the step of displaying a preview of contents of the object that at least a portion of the cursor is over. 15
5. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of displaying information on the video display further comprises the step of displaying property information about the object that at least a portion of the cursor is over. 20
6. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of displaying property information further comprises the step of display help information regarding the object. 25
7. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the input device is a mouse and the step of positioning the cursor further comprises the steps of tracking movements of the mouse by the user and updating position of the cursor on the video display. 30
8. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of displaying objects on the video display further comprises the step of displaying a cursor on the video display having a pointing portion for pointing to an object on the video display and an information portion for displaying information about the object to which the pointing portion points. 35
9. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of determining what information is associated with the object that at least a portion of the cursor is over. 40
10. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of displaying information on the video display further comprises the steps of: 45
 - (i) determining whether the information cursor is specified as "On"; and

(ii) in response to determining whether the information cursor is specified as "On", displaying information on the video display about the object that at least a portion of the cursor is over when the information cursor is specified as "On".

11. In a data processing system having a mouse, having at least one button, and a video display, a method comprising the steps of:
 - (a) displaying a cursor, a source-object icon for a source object and a destination-object icon for a destination object on the video display;
 - (b) in response to movements of the mouse by a user, moving the cursor to point to the source-object icon;
 - (c) displaying on the video display a name of the source object as part of the cursor;
 - (d) in response to the user depressing the button of the mouse while the cursor points to the source object icon and moving the mouse while keeping the button depressed, dragging the source-object icon over the video display to where the destination-object icon is positioned so that the cursor points to the destination-object icon; and
 - (e) displaying a name of the destination object along with the name of the source object as part of the cursor.
12. In a data processing system having at least one processor and a video display, a method comprising the steps of:
 - (a) displaying a pointing portion of an information cursor on the video display, said pointing portion pointing to an icon associated with an object; and
 - (b) displaying information about the object associated with the icon to which the pointing portion of the information cursor points as part of the information cursor.
13. A data processing system, comprising:
 - (a) a video display;
 - (b) an input device operable by a user to communicate with the data processing system;
 - (c) means for producing a user interface on the video display;
 - (d) means for displaying objects on the user interface;
 - (e) means for displaying a cursor, having an indicator portion and an information display portion, so that the indicator portion indicates a user selected one of the objects displayed on the user interface; and

(f) means for displaying information regarding the object indicated by the indicator portion of the cursor in the information display portion of the cursor.

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14. The data processing system as recited in claim 13 wherein the input device is a mouse.

15. The data processing system as recited in claim 13 wherein the input device is a key-
board.

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16. The data processing system of claim 13 wherein the means for displaying information further comprises means for displaying a name
of the object indicated by the indicator portion
of the cursor in the information display portion
of the cursor.

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17. The data processing system of claim 13 wherein the means for displaying information further comprises means for displaying a pre-
view of contents of the object indicated by the
indicator portion of the cursor in the informa-
tion display portion of the cursor.

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18. The data processing system of claim 13 wherein the means for displaying information further comprises means for displaying prop-
erty information about the object indicated by
the indicator portion of the cursor in the in-
formation display portion of the cursor.

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19. The data processing system of claim 13, fur-
ther comprising means for turning "On" or
"Off" the cursor such that when the cursor is
turned "Off", the means for displaying informa-
tion is deactivated.

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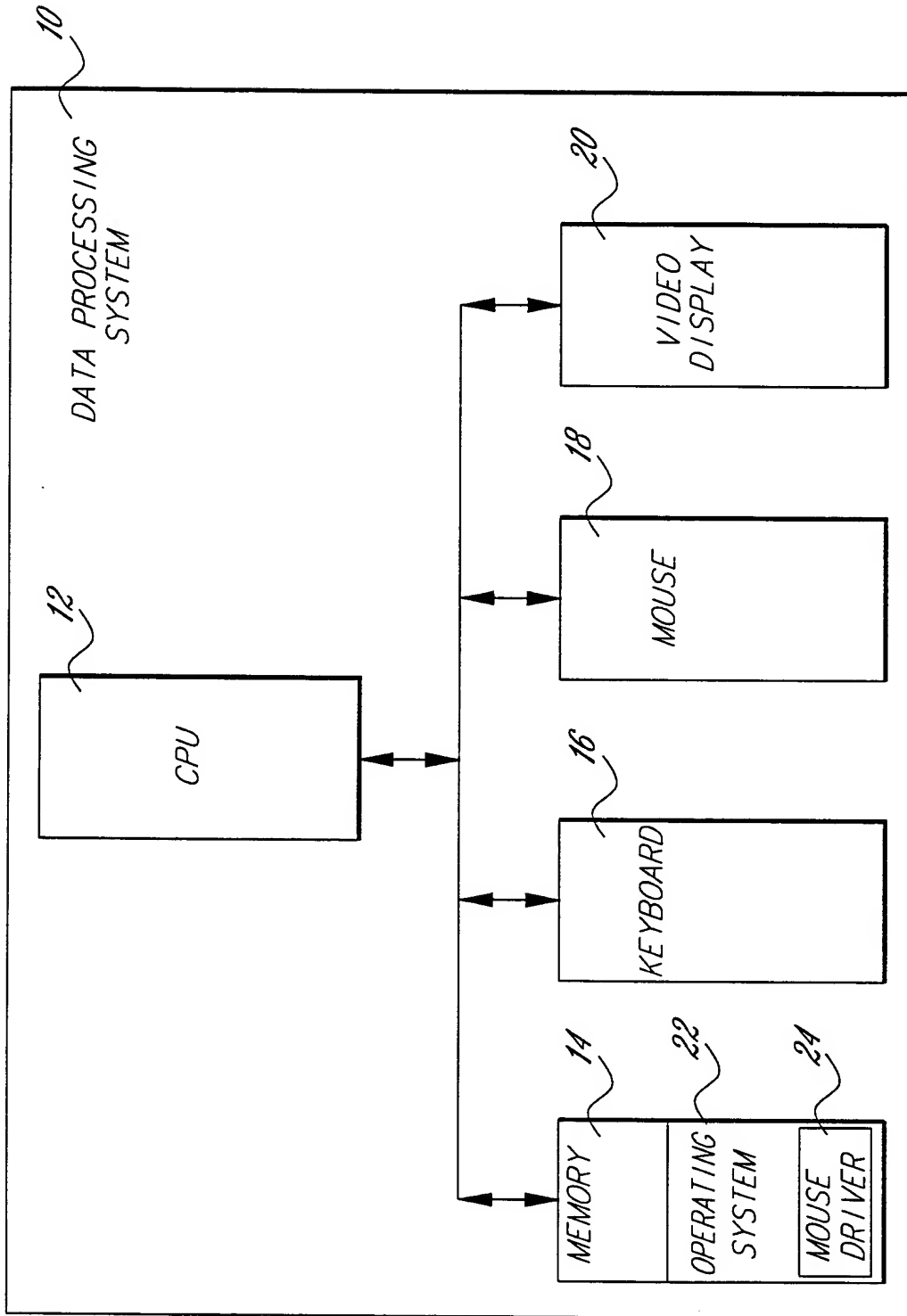
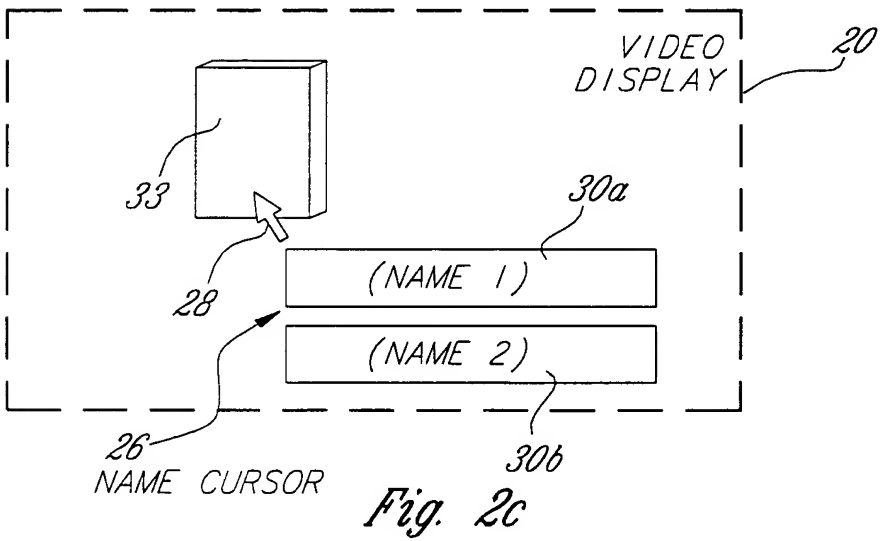
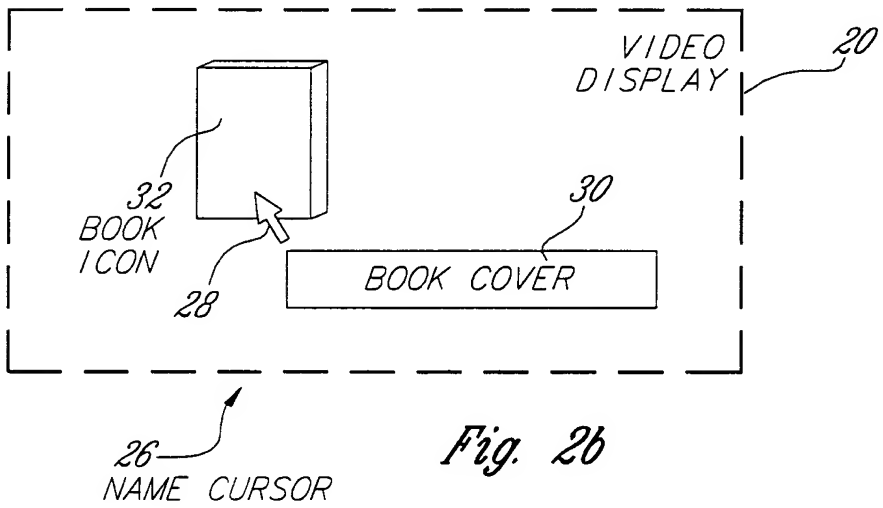
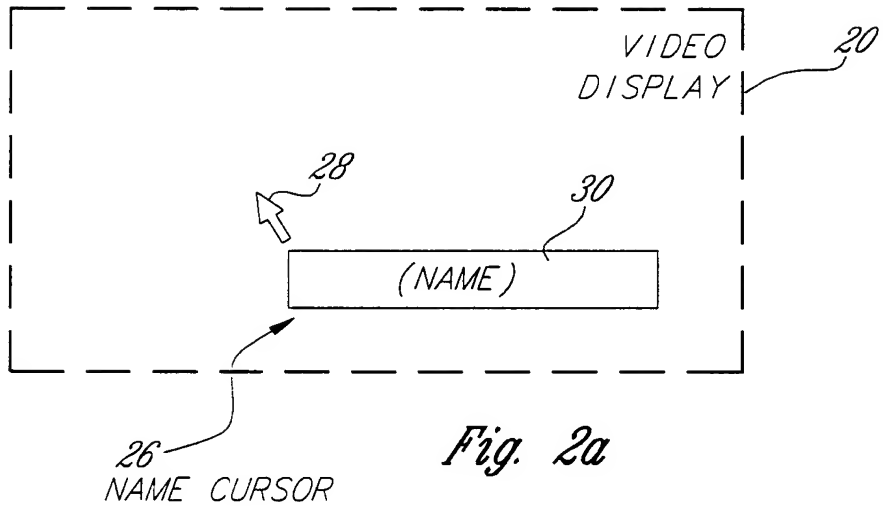
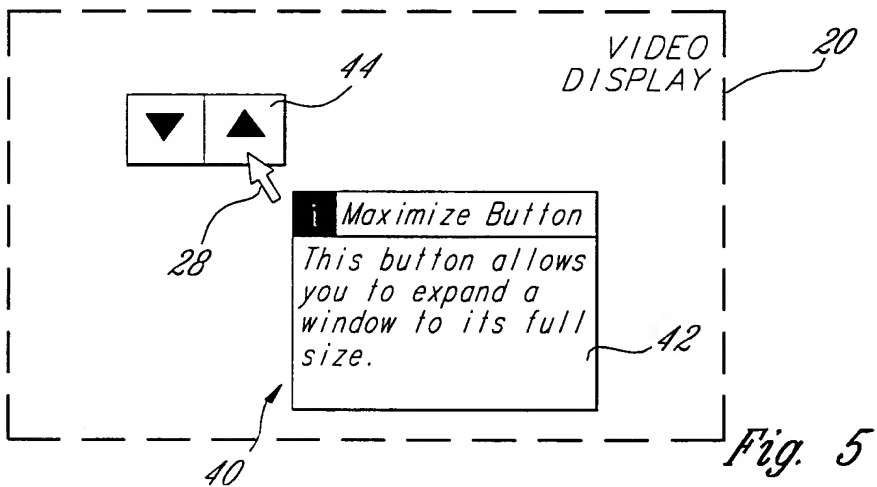
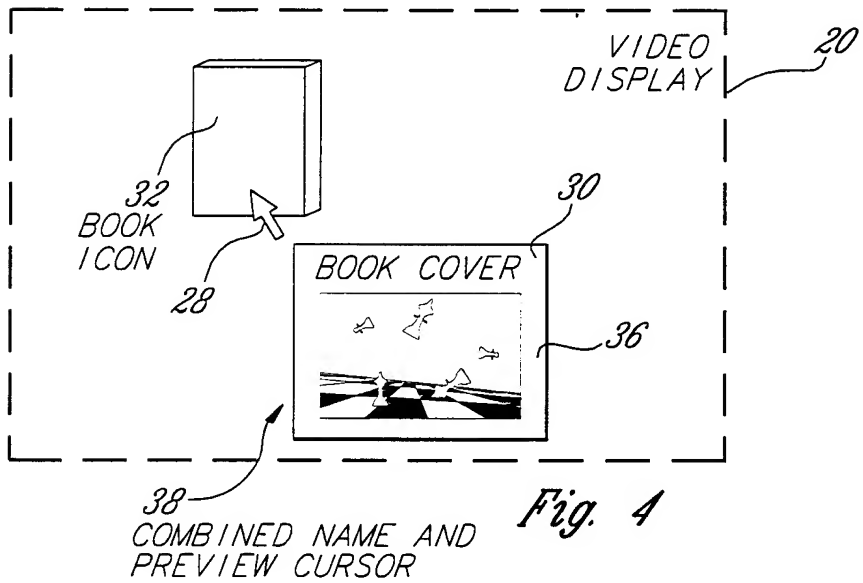
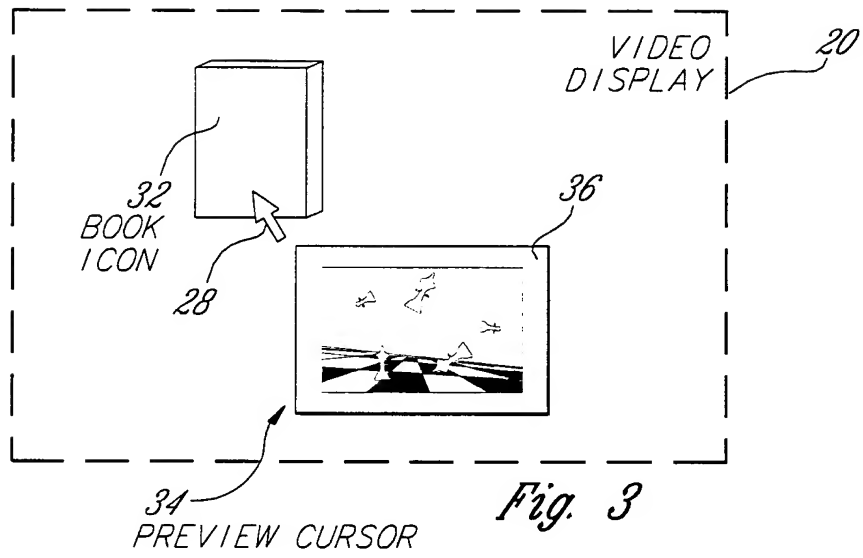
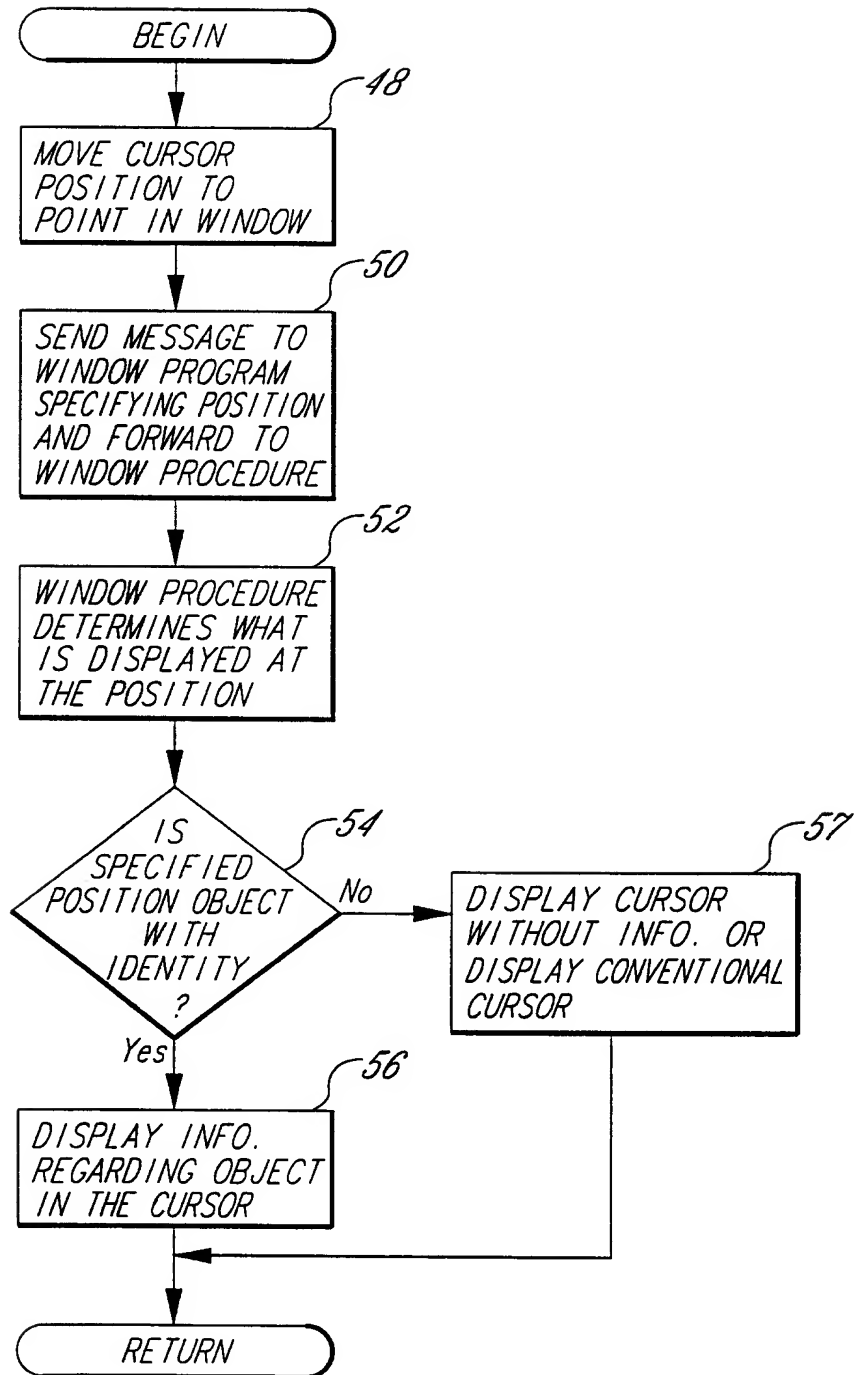
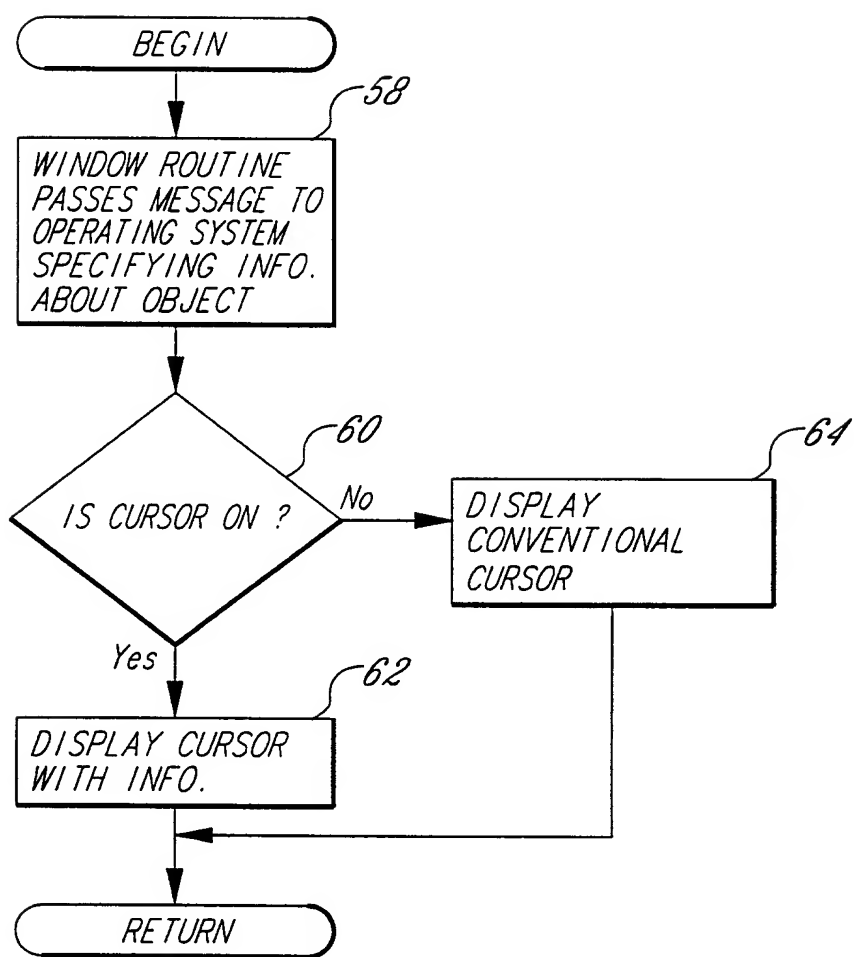


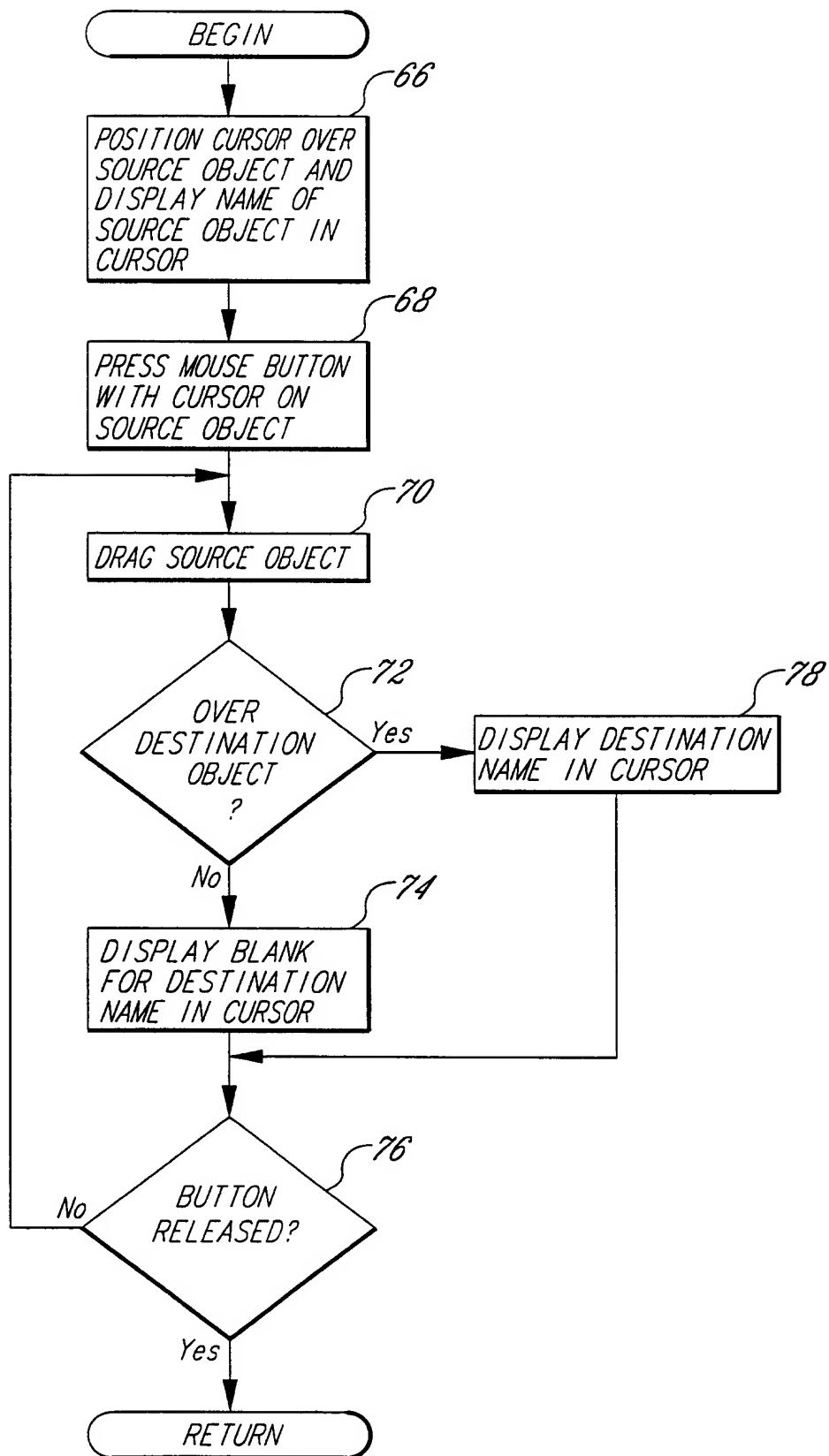
Fig. 1





*Fig. 6*

*Fig. 7*

*Fig. 8*



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 94 10 6425

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.5)
X	MACINTOSH REFERENCE 7 1991 pages 30 - 31	1, 4-7, 9, 10, 13-15, 17-19	G06F3/033
A	---	2	
A	IBM TECHNICAL DISCLOSURE BULLETIN vol. 33, no. 6A , November 1990 , NEW YORK US page 104 XP107648 'UNOBTRUSIVE APPLICATION ICON LABEL INTERFACE' * the whole document *	1, 2, 7	
P, X	IBM TECHNICAL DISCLOSURE BULLETIN vol. 36, no. 8 , August 1993 , NEW YORK US page 669 'User-Controlled Display of Hypermedia Links via Mouse Location' * page 669, line 12 - line 22 *	1, 7, 10, 13-15, 19	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.5)
			G06F
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 3 August 1994	Examiner Bailas, A
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